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ABSTRACT

Vocational teacher educators need to take an active role in the move toward ensuring equity in vocational education. Tradition appears to be the major obstacle to achievement of sex equity in vocational occupations, and the workrole perception of vocational teachers, teacher educators, vocational guidance counselors, and administrators has likewise been molded by the sex role traditions of society. Race and ethnic discrimination is more subtle. Grossly unequal enrollments continue in vocational programs, and this can only lead to prepetuation and prolongation of inequity in employment for women, the handicapped, and minorities. Some strategies that have been used to promote equity in vocational programs include sensitivity workshops or activities; interdisciplinary teams; using sound research relating to equity concerns and problems that pertain to vocational education, occupational equity, and employment opportunities to modify teacher education programs; redesign of teacher education programs; and selective recruitment for equity. Vocational teacher educators can become involved in some activities to facilitate sex equity, including infusing equity awareness activities into courses, encouraging students from nontraditional backgrounds to enter graduate vocational education programs, helping nontraditional students, encouraging research, and cooperating with administrators and guidance counselors in developing sex equity strategies. (YLB)

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Research and Development Series No. 214Q

EQUITY FROM A VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

by

Clyde W. Welter

SUMMARY Vocational educators have grappled with equity as a problem and have espoused it as a cause since 1963 when Congress issued both an equity mandate and an equity challenge with the passage of the Vocational Education Act. This paper is one of seventeen reports commissioned by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education to meet the equity challenge through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing three perspectives—academic, vocational education, and special interest group advocacy.

The following paper looks at equity issues from the perspective of a teacher educator whose responsibilities include providing preservice and inservice training for the preparation of vocational teachers at the secondary and postsecondary levels; performing research; and providing graduate education for those who aspire to leadership positions in vocational education. The author's deep concern about equity in vocational education is evident in his discussions of occupational segregation by sex and racial discrimination and because of the current attitudes of vocational educators and the need to eliminate stereotypes. He makes many suggestions for changing attitudes and emphasizes both the importance of multidisciplinary team efforts to bring about change and the importance of heterogeneity among those employed in vocational education.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us in vocational teacher education see as our primary mission the provision of quality pre- and inservice education for vocational teachers of secondary and postsecondary students. Another part of our mission is to conduct research and to provide graduate education for those who aspire to leadership positions in vocational education. For the most part, we believe we are accomplishing this mission in a competent fashion. However, we have been remiss in some respects, namely in our failure to take significant action to promote equity in vocational education.

The failure of vocational teacher educators to use their influence and positions to reduce or mitigate sex bias and sex stereotyping in vocational programs at all levels (including teacher education programs) is apparent from the enrollment statistics relating to the number of women in traditionally male-dominated programs and the

number of men in traditionally female-dominated programs. (Sex equity is discussed in more detail in the next section of this paper.)

Vocational teachers and vocational teacher educators have also done very little, collectively, to promote equity for the handicapped, for the limited-English proficient, and for adults with special needs in vocational education. We have a better track record in serving the socioeconomically disadvantaged, including blacks, but even in this area of equity our accomplishments fall short. Vocational education is still viewed in much of the black community as deadend education.

Those of us in vocational teacher education who are concerned about the question of equity in vocational education and in employment are beginning to ask ourselves what more we can do, personally and professionally, to promote equity. This paper is devoted to a discussion of equity concerns vocational educators must confront and actions that vocational teacher educators can take or are taking to promote equity.

AREAS OF EQUITY

Sex Equity

Tradition is perhaps the major obstacle to achievement of sex equity in occupations that come under the umbrella of vocational education. Individuals who enter occupations or occupational training programs that traditionally have been dominated by members of the opposite sex often encounter prejudice, disapproval, or ridicule. Both men and women who enter nontraditional work roles may be confronted with problems of acceptance; in fact, these nontraditional work roles are actively discriminated against in many work places.

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In addition to contending with the prejudices and ridicule of supervisors and other workers, in most cases, those who enter nontraditional occupations also encounter the disapproval and disappointment of family, friends, and interested bystanders, all of whom may perceive traditional roles in society as providing the only proper guidelines for human endeavor and conduct. Thus, a woman who announces that she intends to become a mason, automobile mechanic, or heavy machine operator may cause grief and annoyance among her tradition-conscious family because they believe that by her career choices she is failing to fulfill her proper roles as a woman. She is, her detractors may believe, sacrificing her femininity and traditional destiny by entering an occupation better left to men. Although men who enter nontraditional roles may also encounter the disapproval of family and friends, they are less likely to be stigmatized than are women if they compensate for, or conform in other ways to the "male image."

However, men entering nontraditional work roles are more likely than are women to have a problem with self-image because in our society men are conditioned to the need for demonstrating their masculinity. Those things that engender in the man a sense of maleness, including doing "man's work," enhance his self-image, whereas anything that he perceives as detracting from his maleness erodes his self-image. This is the reason, or at least one reason, why one finds so few men in secretarial positions and in secretarial training programs even though a good male secretary today can earn more than do men in any number of male-dominated occupations. The male's desire and drive for a self-image that conforms to, and furthers the traditions and role models he observes in society has been nearly as effective in keeping men out of female occupations as have discrimination, social, and family pressures in keeping women out of male occupations.

The work-role perceptions of those of us who serve as vocational teachers, teacher educators, vocational guidance counselors, and administrators have likewise been molded by the sex role traditions of society. We have all come of age in a society where women are the homemakers, elementary school teachers, nurses, and secretaries, while men are the executives, doctors, heavy machine operators, carpenters, and mechanics. As a result, many of us have the same perceptual hang-ups as do noneducators in accepting nontraditional work roles. Although we may be sincere in professing to believe in the rightness and fairness of sex equity, our deeds (tone of voice, comments to women or men enrolled in nontraditional courses, grading policies, student recruitment processes, and so forth) often belie our words and indicate that in our basic being we retain the traditional perceptions of "appropriate" male and female roles.

Race and Ethnic Equity

Discrimination in employment based on race or ethnic background is as pervasive as is discrimination based on sex, but such discrimination today is often more conspiratorial than sex discrimination because there is no socially acceptable way in which such discrimination can be camouflaged. It is still acceptable to at least a segment of our society—including many women—to say that a woman should not enter this occupation or that occupation because the occupation is too strenuous or too dangerous. Although discriminatory, such statements imply a concern for the welfare of women. There is nothing comparable to this that one can say about blacks or other ethnic groups to camouflage a policy of discrimination. Therefore, exclusion must be accomplished in other, more subtle, ways. For example, an organization that professes to be an equal opportunity employer may exclude black or ethnic applicants by writing job qualifications to fit particular individuals who have been previously identified as the choice for the position that is to be filled. In this way the organization can advertise a position with a fair degree of assurance that "undesirable" applicants will not be able to meet the stated job specifications.

Another subtle form of discrimination, practiced against blacks (as well as women) at the professional and managerial level, is discrimination through "tokenism." Organizations have been known to create noncritical professional positions for which minorities are hired as a means of illustrating the organization's nondiscriminatory policy. However, those employed in these positions frequently find they are impotent or negligible because their assigned duties and responsibilities play no significant part in accomplishing either the mission or the worthwhile functions of the organizations.

Any astute observer of society recognizes that employment inequities resulting from race and ethnic discrimination remain a problem in spite of recent advances in reducing overt discrimination. Where equity is concerned, equally important factors in limiting the social and occupational mobility of blacks and ethnics, however, are the barriers resulting from the culture of poverty into which many of these people are born. The negative effects of poverty are felt by poor whites, too, but blacks and ethnics have been deprived of the opportunity to move into the economic and social mainstreams of society for so many generations that, unlike poor whites, they are over-represented in the poverty enclaves of American society.

A war on poverty was declared in the 1960s to bring the poor and the unemployed into the mainstream of society. The theory behind many of the special social and educational programs that constituted this "war" held that the disadvantaged could rise above their status if they were helped to change their attitudes and perceptions and were helped to acquire employability skills. Since so

much money and effort were spent on them, the failure of the many social and educational programs initiated during the past two decades to make significant improvement in the plight of the poor may be indicative of the magnitude of the problem. But perhaps the fact that these programs have had only limited success in increasing the social and occupational mobility of the poor is also an indication that the approaches we are using to attack this very complex societal problem are much too simplistic.

The underlying philosophy of most vocational programs aimed at improving the lot of the minorities and economically disadvantaged has been that these people could achieve economic independence, social mobility, and a positive self-concept if educators would provide counseling, compensatory education, and vocational training. Expectations often outran reality, however, and the participants in these vocational programs did not find the success, or at least the degree of success, that they had been led to expect.

The fact that success (often envisioned as "the good life" portrayed on television and in movies) continued to elude the poor was one more indication to them of their incompetence, or of the injustice of society, or both. Yet, some progress has taken place, and many of us still envision vocational programs as one way for minorities and the socioeconomically disadvantaged to begin their journey toward full equity in society.

EQUITY IN VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

That occupational sex stereotyping continues in vocational training programs is evident from the fact that women account for more than 90 percent of the enrollments in health and secretarial/clerical programs, whereas men represent 90 to 95 percent of the enrollments in technical, industrial, and trade subjects. Society's perception of the appropriate work roles for men and women is the obvious cause of such unequal enrollments of men and women in specific types of programs.

Although sex stereotyping represents the inequity most visible today in vocational program enrollments, these vocational programs are still enrolling few handicapped students, and most enroll proportionately fewer minorities than other students (although this varies with geographical location, of course). For whatever cause, grossly unequal enrollments in vocational programs can only lead to the perpetuation and prolongation of inequity in employment, since these training programs provide a substantial portion of the labor pool from which employees are selected.

The starting point in turning around enrollments in vocational education programs must be the elimination of the biases of vocational teachers, teacher educators, guidance counselors, and school administrators, and instilling in them a total commitment to equity in all vocational programs. This is the greatest challenge facing vocational teacher education, and the difficulty of doing this is compounded by the fact that many of us in vocational education are biased ourselves (consciously or unconsciously) because we have grown up in and been conditioned by a society in which men and women each have had rather well defined roles, in which blacks and other minorities often have been assigned negative personal attributes relating to intelligence, industriousness, and work roles, and in which the handicapped have not been considered (if considered at all) a part of the mainstream of society. Because those of us in teacher education have been an integral part of a society in which such stereotypes exist, we must examine our own beliefs, feelings, and actions to determine where we really stand on the issue of equity.

In the past most of us in teacher education, like people in general, have given relatively little attention to inequities in society unless we or our families were personally affected or threatened by these inequities. This does not necessarily mean that we approved of the inequities (many times we didn't even look at situations in terms of what is fair and what is not) but merely that we were so busy going about our business that we did not perceive the righting of wrongs as a part of our mission. Even today, with all the talk of equity, we are often so preoccupied with building or maintaining our programs and are so conditioned by society to the status quo that we are unaware of the inequities that exist in and perhaps are even perpetuated by our own vocational programs. We are so busy with our traditional day-to-day professional activities that we do not take the time to consider the responsibilities that we have to help bring about equity.

Therefore, any attempt to eliminate inequities and to equalize enrollments in vocational programs must include strategies that will create in the minds and souls of vocational educators, counselors, and administrators an awareness of the inequalities that exist in vocational education, a belief that such inequalities are wrong, and a desire to use whatever influence their positions afford to promote equity. Once this has been achieved, we can concentrate on additional techniques and strategies that can be used to help create equity in vocational education. (Some of these are discussed in this paper.)

Other essentials to creating equity in vocational education include changing the attitudes of the employers of our graduates, the attitudes of potential students and their families and friends, and the attitudes and concepts of other teachers in the educational system.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS

In this section are presented some strategies that have been used to promote equity in vocational education programs with varying degrees of success and some suggestions concerning the use and integration of these strategies in vocational programs.

Sensitivity Workshops or Activities

Many of us in teacher education have conducted or participated in workshops designed to sensitize the workshop or activity participants to the feelings of other people. For example, sensitizing activities are frequently used to show teachers or prospective teachers the types of problems a physically handicapped person must face daily. In one frequently used sensitizing activity a sighted person is required to go through the day blindfolded in order to experience firsthand some of the problems faced by people who cannot see. Another activity is to confine a physically fit person to a wheelchair for a period of time so that the person can experience the problems and frustrations of those who do not have use of their legs.

Similar sensitivity activities have often been used to expose teachers to the problems faced by the socioeconomically disadvantaged, limited-English proficient, and racial minorities. In one workshop conducted for the purpose of sensitizing white teachers to the problems of poor blacks, the teachers were sent into predominantly black communities to live for a week. The participants, allowed to take with them only a few dollars, were to try to find a place to live and a way to support themselves for the week without returning to their home or school. Although all who participated in the program had volunteered, few remained for the entire week. The purpose, of course, was to show teachers of the socioeconomically disadvantaged not only the problems related to being poor, but also the psychological threat a minority person feels when immersed in another culture.

In programs designed to accomplish essentially the same purpose, student teachers from white middle-class backgrounds have been sent to disadvantaged communities to live and participate in community life while student teaching in the community school. For example, in one such project in Colorado, volunteer white student teachers in business education were placed in poor Mexican-American enclaves for their student-teaching experience. In addition to their student-teaching assignment, they were required to participate in various community services (such

as accompanying social workers and community nurses on their visits to homes of the poor and disabled).

Sensitizing men to the problems encountered by women in nontraditional roles or sensitizing women to problems encountered by men in nontraditional roles is difficult to accomplish through real life experiences. Although a man can be placed in a job or another role normally reserved for women and a woman may be placed in a job or another role normally reserved for men, the problems each encounters in these roles are not necessarily the same problems the other sex faces in nontraditional roles. For this reason, simulations are probably more likely than are life experiences to sensitize men and women to problems encountered by the other sex as a result of sex bias and discrimination.

Although sensitizing educators to the difficulties encountered by minorities, the handicapped, and by people in nontraditional sex roles is unquestionably of some benefit in alerting educators to the nature of true problems created by social inequities, the sensitizing experiences can have only a limited effect for several reasons.

First, because of the threatening nature of many sensitizing activities, programs that go beyond classroom simulation must be voluntary. Those who volunteer to participate in such programs are frequently individuals who are already sensitive to the problems, whereas those who need sensitivity training the most do not volunteer for it.

Second, it seems very unlikely that short sensitizing sessions or activities can bring one to a real or deep understanding of the frustration and hopelessness faced by those who must constantly live with inequalities.

Third, sensitivity to a social, occupational, or educational inequity does not automatically indicate what actions can help alleviate the conditions causing the inequity. Unless the sensitizing activities are a part of a total program in which participants are taught or helped to develop strategies for alleviating the inequities, the sensitivity training will have marginal value.

Any attempt at developing a sensitivity training program or any attempt to alleviate equity problems should involve specialists from several disciplines. The need for, and discussion of an interdisciplinary approach to solving equity problems follows.

Interdisciplinary Teams

In higher education, as in education at all levels, we have too little communication across disciplines. The artificial barriers that separate one discipline from another have tended to divide us and limit the help that we are capable of providing one another in solving societal and educational problems. Thus, many of us are frequently working on the same general problem, each unaware of what the other is doing. When we do communicate and try to involve others in what we are doing, as we occasionally do, the involvement often consists merely of inviting a member from another discipline to address us or to contribute a paper to our professional literature, after which we each go our own way again. As a result of such efforts everyone feels good, but only a minimal and fleeting communication and exchange of ideas result.

What is really needed is an approach in which faculty from various disciplines are true team members working together on a continuing basis to define each problem clearly (since a problem is often not what it appears to be), to identify the causes of the problem (which also are often not what they at first appear to be), and to propose and test solutions. In the case of the equity problems considered here, such an interdisciplinary team might consist of a psychologist, sociologist, anthropologist, personnel management specialist, guidance counselor, language teacher, vocational teachers and teacher educators, and vocational administrators.

If such a team were to cooperate in research, share knowledge and expertise, and work together to propose and test solutions to the problems involved in equity, we would all gain from the experiences and advance much further toward solutions to our equity problems than is the case when we each continue to go our separate ways. In business and industry such team approaches are used effectively to solve both long- and short-range problems; in education we too seldom cross discipline lines to come together to attack problems.

Need for Sound Research

In the educational system much money is poured into funding nearly identical materials development workshops and projects in which teachers are brought together to develop materials for classroom use (for example, materials for use in educating the socioeconomically disadvantaged, for correcting sex bias in education, and for a myriad of other purposes). In many school districts teachers have participated in so many such workshops that they have become jaded, and the public—or those of the public who are aware of what is going on—often feel that too little value results from such activities. Certainly, anyone who has carefully reviewed the products of numerous workshops quickly becomes aware that the materials produced are often repetitive, of questionable value for curriculum

purposes, and are likely to have very little, if any, impact on educational programs.

This is not to say that such workshops and projects themselves have no value, for generally they do serve to raise the consciousness of the participants concerning the topic of the workshop. However, since most classroom teachers are not curriculum specialists and are not writers, the value of such workshops and projects is generally limited to the changes effected in the participants themselves.

The disturbing thing about the vast amounts of money invested in such efforts is the fact that proportionately so little money has been devoted to conducting sound empirical research (or theoretical research, for that matter) to find the true nature and implications of the problems being addressed in these workshops and projects. For example, although "sextyping" (assigning sex designations for given jobs) of occupations has been studied extensively, only limited research has been conducted to determine the reasons certain occupations are sex typed as they are. The evidence gained from the research that has been done in this area thus far indicates that although the proportion of males and females in an occupation is the most important influence in sextyping that occupation, the sex stereotype of an occupation and the sex stereotypes of the tasks which comprise the occupation are not necessarily related. If additional research verifies this finding, would not the information be useful to workshop participants who are working on ways to counteract sex stereotypes and bias?

Relatively little research has been done to discover the nature and implications of vocational teacher bias, even thouqh such information would seem critical to any changes in vocational teacher education programs aimed at bringing about equity in vocational education. Similarly, little sound research has been done to determine the extent to which bias of administrators and guidance counselors limits nontraditional enrollments in vocational programs.

The findings of the research that has been done concerning the stereotyping of sex roles and of racial and ethnic groups is frequently disseminated in technical language that is incomprehensible to the average individual; thus the value of research that could have tremendous practical implications is often not realized.

Vocational teacher educators should be joining with those from other disciplines to conduct research relating to the many equity problems and concerns that pertain to vocational education, occupational equity, and employment opportunities, and they should use the knowledge gleaned from such research to modify teacher education programs. Unfortunately, this has not generally been the case, and the research that has been done relating to equity has had little impact on most preservice and inservice vocational teacher education programs.

Redesign of Teacher Education Programs

If teacher education programs influence those who attend such programs (and the extent to which they do is another area that needs additional research), those of us who are involved in teacher education programs have the opportunity to help prospective and practicing teachers rethink their philosophies of equity.

Vocational teacher educators at times feel they are expected to accomplish miracles. As state teacher certification requirements are increased, many teacher educators become alarmed at the possibility that these new requirements will cut into the amount of time students can devote to their major. It sometimes seems we want the prospective teacher to know so much, but there is so little time in which to teach it, that we despair at the thought of teacher educators being charged with the additional burden of modifying perceptions, eliminating bias, and generally dealing with this whole area of educational and occupational equity.

How can teacher educators undo the bias that is the result of generations of tradition? Is this really our mission? How are we to improve the ability of vocational teachers to work with the handicapped and disadvantaged when we teacher educators are unsure how such people can be brought into the mainstream of opportunity, employment, and society? What in the world can vocational teacher educators do to reduce discrimination in employment or effect changes in sex role stereotyping?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Furthermore, the way in which the above questions are posed implies that the teacher educator must shoulder the burden alone, whereas in reality any solution to the problem must involve cooperative enterprise. Teacher educators must become more adept at linking up with the other significant groups, some of whom are outside of the province of education, who have an interest in the education of vocational teachers: representatives of business and industry, secondary and vocational school personnel, and representatives of professional associations and worker unions.

If we were to redesign our teacher education programs so that representatives from each of these groups play a significant part in our curriculum development, and if we were to involve these representatives in the development of strategies to achieve equity, we would all be the winners. Under such an approach the image of the teacher educator could change from that of a pedant to that of a group leader or team manager. (This is not to say that vocational teacher educators are pedants, but they are often perceived to be so by noneducators.)

Recruitment for Equity

An obviously important element in bringing about greater equality in vocational education program enrollments rests with selective recruitment. Nontraditional recruitment efforts will entail enrolling more minorities and handicapped in vocational programs, more women in trade and technical programs, and more men in business education, distributive education, and health care programs.

As discussed in a previous section of this paper, most students are strongly influenced by traditional occupational stereotypes. Women who otherwise might enter technical, trade, or industrial education programs avoid doing so because they perceive that they will be discriminated against or ridiculed in the vocational program and elsewhere, and will be unable to find jobs upon graduation. Men avoid such vocational programs as secretarial, clerical, fashion merchandising, and health care because they perceive such programs as representing a threat to their masculine self-image.

Until these stereotypes have been neutralized, the best hope of vocational educators for encouraging nontraditional enrollments will rest with special recruitment techniques. It should be stated again that an important ingredient of success is team effort. By working with local employers to secure their cooperation in providing job stations for nontraditional students in cooperative programs and in committing jobs for qualified nontraditional graduates, the vocational teacher will be able to offer special incentives to students who otherwise would not consider entering vocational programs in which members of their own race or sex are not represented. To conduct a successful campaign for recruiting nontraditional students, the vocational teacher must also include on the recruitment team the school's vocational guidance counselors, administrators, and student leaders (especially students from the dominant sex and racial/ethnic groups enrolled in the vocational programs).

Another facet of recruitment for equity is the need to recruit qualified handicapped and minority member representatives into advanced graduate programs that prepare vocational educators and other vocational personnel for leadership positions at the local, state, and national levels.

Finally, chairpersons of adult and vocational education departments should recruit faculty from groups currently underrepresented in the vocational programs. Although the extent to which teacher educators serve as role models and affect the enrollment of nontraditional students in undergraduate teacher education programs is open to question, equity in employment is as desirable in teacher education as in any other occupation; therefore, equal or proportionate representation in teacher education is a desirable goal, in and of itself.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed in the first section of this paper, most of us in vocational teacher education have done relatively little to promote equity in vocational education because, among other reasons, we have been so involved in building or maintaining our traditional programs. However, as a result of the current national focus on equity, many projects have been funded by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education and the Women's Educational Equity Act Programs, and more of us are becoming aware of the need to take an active role in the move toward ensuring equity in vocational education. The following are a few of the activities in which vocational teacher educators might become involved as we accept this responsibility.

1. Infuse equity awareness activities into all courses and activities included in our preservice and inservice programs. Vocational teachers and prospective vocational teachers often hold traditional views concerning occupational stereotypes. Major and continuous efforts are required to overcome such stereotypes.

2. Encourage capable students from nontraditional backgrounds to enter graduate vocational education programs. With a few exceptions (such as business and distributive education), today most teacher educators in each vocational service area are of the same sex as the commonly held sex stereotype for that occupation. Also, blacks, ethnic groups, and the handicapped are grossly underrepresented in teacher education and vocational leadership positions.

3. Give extra help, when needed, to the nontraditional students, but expect these students to meet the same standards as others upon completion of the program. Nontraditional students often need compensatory education because of deficiencies in *their* backgrounds; however, to allow these students to leave the program achieving satisfactory competencies would do teachers and *their* students a disservice, and would only perpetuate existing bias and stereotypes.

4. Conduct and encourage others to conduct research to find answers to many of the unresolved questions concerning equity in education and employment. Team up with faculty from other disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, and sociology in developing the research to provide the broadest possible perspective on the problem and research procedures.

5. Team up with administrators and guidance counselors in local school districts in developing strategies for promoting equity in secondary and postsecondary vocational programs. Funds for such joint projects are often available.

Funding needs to be made available to those vocational teacher educators who want to conduct the research and develop the curricula necessary to modify the equity perceptions of inservice and preservice teachers. Unless funds are made available, teacher educators will not be able to deduct sufficient time from their heavy regularly assigned loads to do the job that needs to be done. The funding guidelines should encourage cooperative projects within the university, between the university and local school districts, and among the university, private enterprise, labor unions, and local school districts.

Finally, the question of whether occupational equity can be achieved resolves itself into the question of how important we think the achievement of such equity is to society. If we are willing as a nation to commit the resources necessary to wage a united war against the biases and stereotypes that create and further inequities, then there is no reason why we cannot succeed in providing true equity in vocational education and in employment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Before vocational educators can adequately meet the special needs of special groups, they must be committed to a philosophy of equitable education. The issue of equity in education has received a great deal of attention over the last ten years from the legislative, judicial, and academic sectors. As a result of this attention, research and analysis have shown that the term "equity" has a different connotation for nearly everyone who has attempted to define and apply it to educational programs. In addition, a host of related terms such as equality, disparity, and discrimination are a part of the vocational educator's daily vocabulary.

In an attempt to help vocational educators to articulate a definition of equity, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education has commissioned seventeen papers on equity from three broad perspectives—academic, vocational, and special needs. The authors in each of the three groups provide their own perceptions of and experiences with equity in education to bring vocational educators to a better understanding of this complex but timely issue.

The National Center is indebted to these seventeen authors for their contribution to furthering research on equity in vocational education.

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